

# Listen

## A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J A N U A R Y 2 0 1 2

V O L 6 : I S S U E 1

### CULTIVATING COMPASSION

Each year, for the past four years, I write an annual "Lives in Remembrance" for the local hospital. One page of letters becoming words is an attempt to embody memories from everyone who died at the hospital during the previous year. It is an impossible mission, at best.

I feel privileged—and somewhat terrified—to write. I prayerfully read eighty to one hundred obituaries provided to me from the spiritual care department. The sacred stories reveal amazing grace in action. How can one page give expression to the life of any individual person, let alone dozens and dozens? And yet, essence reveals itself; stories weave into a new wholeness.

Flying home from a 2008 SDI Leadership Institute in Connecticut, USA, I had planned to read the obituaries during the long flight, and write the reflection. When I pulled the news clippings from a plain manila envelope, I received an odd look from the handsome man seated next to me. After several minutes, he asked, "what are you doing?" I explained, and said the project was for a hospital in Alaska, USA, where I lived. His face wrinkled a bit, and he asked, "where in Alaska?" Turned out he lives a few miles from me, and was a long-time resident of the Kenai Peninsula. We spent the next several hours reading the obituaries together. He added



Mourning Dove—*Zenaida macroura*

his own stories and memories of the people he'd known personally.

Central Peninsula Hospital (CPH) is a *Planetree* affiliated hospital. *Planetree*, a holistic, patient-centered model for health care believes that, "we are human beings, caring for other human beings; we are all caregivers; and care giving is best achieved through kindness and compassion." The *Planetree* affiliation affirms what CPH already knew—it is healing to make time to cultivate and tend to the living, the dying, and the grieving. It is valuable to remember the men and women who have died and touch our lives—however briefly, or significantly. One day each year family members, nurses, doctors, staff, and volunteers are invited to a Time of Remembrance to recall the women and men they may have encountered for minutes, or known for decades.

This year, for the first time, I was present at the ritual and read aloud *Lives in Review...2011*. When I looked at the faces of everyone who gathered, and recalled the ninety obituaries I'd read, a sacred knowing available to each of us was evoked in me—*all is one*. Love is the circumference, and we are in the center—connected, embraced, embodied—in time, and transcending time.

### PONDER

- Who are the people—and animals—you embrace, and let go of?
- Are you a care-giver for someone dear to you?
- How do you care for yourself?
- What contemplative practices sustain you during times of transition, loss, healing, and transformation?

How would meeting regularly with a spiritual director be a time of tender solace and comfort for you?

—Pegge Erkeneff

### SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Guide: *Compassionate listening...*
- Contemplative Reflection: Create your *Life in Remembrance*
- Poetry: *Broken Wide Open*
- Ask Owl



## COMPASSIONATE LISTENING Through Spiritual Direction...

**A**s I journey with the uncertainty of life with illness, a spiritual director is my non-judgmental companion through dark uncertain times. I find God questioning with me. —*Helena, Ontario, Canada* /

Compassionate listening from my spiritual director is a sacred and grace-filled blessing that continually feeds my soul so that I in turn may spiritually feed others through compassionate acts of the heart.

—*Genny, New Mexico, USA* /

Whilst I find compassionate listening helpful, it is the discernment my spiritual director then shows which is most valuable. I don't just want to be listened to! I want someone who can help me make sense of what I am seeking to express. —*John-Francis, England, UK* /

The experience of compassionate listening leads me deeper into prayer. The questions, struggles, and faith brought into the sacred space I share with another inspires me to listen more carefully to the movement of the Spirit in my own life. —*Adam, Illinois, USA* /

We supply food to that gaping space when we listen. The energy of love makes it possible to be one with all. God's essence is communicated.

—*Rosemarie, New York, USA* /

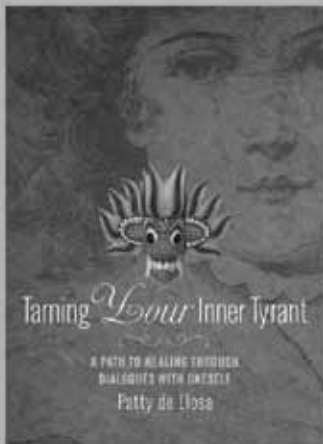
As I am listened to I have space to bring my thoughts into the open; there I can see how different parts of my life fit together and how events during the week are related to issues that were on my mind two or three weeks ago. Without someone listening many of these thoughts would remain buried within me. —*John, Victoria, Australia* /

I companion several in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and am blessed as I watch God work miracles in them through his loving presence in their lives, as they come to recognize that divine presence, receive it, and hold it tenderly, humbly, and obediently in their hearts.

—*Pauline, Oregon, USA* /

Compassionate listening reminds me to be wide open to Life and the ever-present beauty of it, and to embrace the humble reality of being human. —*Ellen, Texas, USA* /

### *A Spiritual Evolution Press, latest releases:*



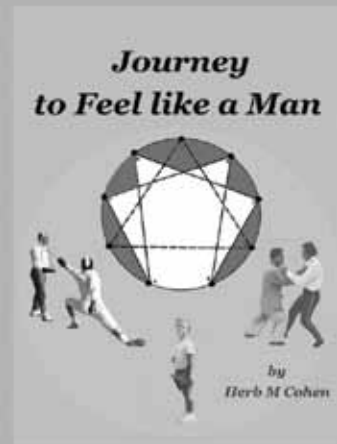
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# FIELD GUIDE

I always feel so energised, sometimes after an *aha* moment where things just make sense or have a different feel to them in some way, sometimes in just being confirmed, encouraged, and supported on the journey.

—Moirra, Ireland

It is a blessing to me in that it enables me to feel that I am not hiding something from others and there is no fear of someone finding out about me and perhaps not liking me because of what has happened to me.

—Helen, ACT, Australia

In times of trouble and illness I've found it very helpful to tell my spiritual director how God is acting in my life through my troubles. Her wise comments have been so helpful. This has prompted me to try to listen to spiritual directees with encouragement. I feel honoured and affirmed when they share their stories with me. This sharing has made me feel of worth when my illness sometimes made me feel quite worthless and useless.

—Mary, New Zealand

After the death of my husband I met my spiritual director. She helped me to discover the woman I had stifled for nearly thirty years, and she was my companion during the birthing process of the person I am today. As a result

I became excited to serve the Lord and live fully and abundantly. I also enrolled in a spiritual director training program and now am the companion to others. This experience has enriched my life, provided me a safe place to grieve my loss and encounter a loving Father waiting to have a deep relationship with me, his beloved daughter. Now, as a spiritual director myself, I am praying it forward to my spiritual directees, the same way my spiritual director prayed for me.

—Joan, Louisiana, USA

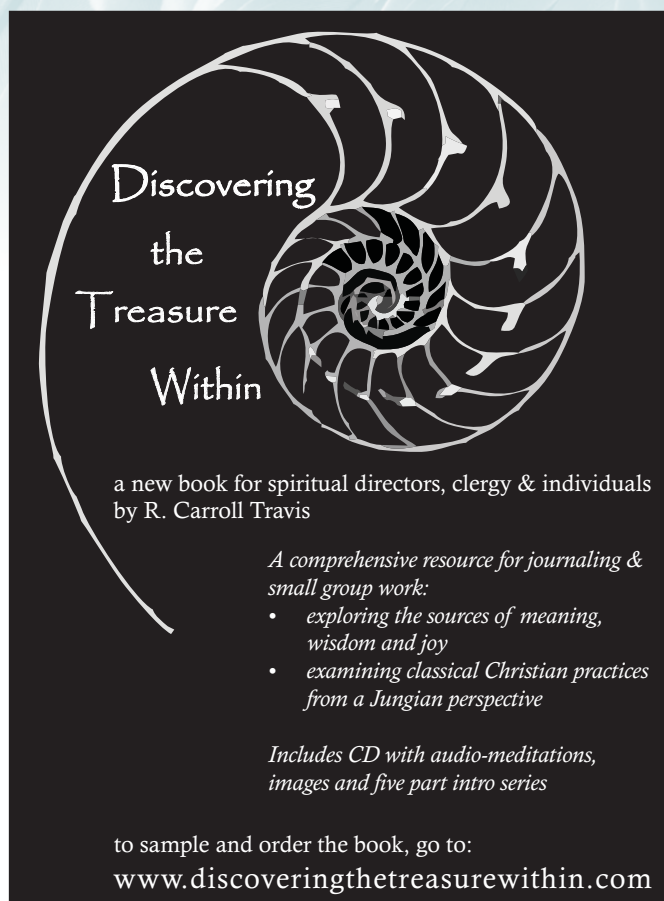
It is a sacred right to be heard. The compassionate, loving gift of companioning another is a sacred call to my own journey and the deep responsibility one has to the other.

—Ruth, New Jersey, USA

Compassionate listening stirs hope within—the kind of hope that is like a star—not seen in the sunshine of prosperity and only discovered in the night of adversity. This gem of hope appears when one has been a long time on the path of spiritual unfolding. In the hush of a moment of recognition one simply savors...and knows.

—Adeline, Saskatchewan, Canada

**Ask yourself: How is compassionate listening a blessing to me?**



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*"There is a time...for balance"*

20-22 March 2012 - Jane Curran and Layne Racht

*There is a time to be born....a time to love....a time for laughter...* The book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) tells us there is a time for everything under the sun, especially a time for balance in our lives. Jane Curran and Layne Racht will explore the inner work that helps to keep our souls in balance.

## GLOBAL RESOURCES : Supporting Your Spiritual Journey

### February 16, 2012

"How to Seek and Find a Spiritual Director"

FREE one hour SDI teleconference

12:00 EDT; 5:00 GMT/UTC

Details and RSVP at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)

### April 19 - 27, 2012

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"Cultivating Compassion"

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### May 22 - 31, 2012

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Registration is now open!

[www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)

### July 20 - August 3, 2012

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Monastery of the Risen Christ School for

Spiritual Directors: Abbot David Geraets

Contact Dr. Marie J. DiSciullo-Naples

207-364-7288; [joyologist@ghi.net](mailto:joyologist@ghi.net)

### Journey Conferences, October, 2012

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## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories everyday. Descriptions of a spiritual guidance relationship include *Anam Cara*, spiritual accompaniment,

spiritual companionship, spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, spiritual mentoring, sacred friendship, and soul friendship. How would you describe a relationship with another person—or group—that listens deeply to you, and receives *your* sacred life story?





# CONTEMPLATIVE REFLECTION

## CREATE YOUR LIFE IN REMEMBRANCE

**G**ather paper and a favorite writing instrument. Or, be ready to type a new document. If it has been a while since you've read an obituary, take a few minutes to simply read one or more from a newspaper or online source.

### BEGIN

Sit and breathe deeply for at least five minutes. Whenever thoughts come into your mind, simply acknowledge them, and let them go. Return to your breathing. Conclude your silent time and invite your imagination and memory to come to your assistance.

You have one page—and only one page—to write your own obituary. Use your imagination to determine when your life ends. It could be in the imminent future, something you are really facing right now, or decades away.

Begin writing. Turn your inner critic and editor off. They will have permission to come back later.

When you've finished writing one page, re-read—out loud—what you've written. Then give a silent thank you to the life-force within you. Put the paper away, or turn the computer off.

Sit silently for at least five minutes, or take a bath, pet an animal, play with a child, or go for a walk. Be gentle with your breathing, and notice what is evoked in you from this reflective process. Give thanks to the goodness in you and the universe—even if you experience discomfort, regret, or sorrow. Memories may awaken in you. Be still and give thanks. Over the next few days, pay attention to your nighttime dreams and the thoughts that come to you.

When a day or more has passed, give yourself time to re-read what you've written—out loud. Glean insights

from your worthy reflection. Are there times of your life you give thanks for? Changes you want to initiate? Areas where forgiveness, joy, or anger erupts? Make notes or journal what comes to your awareness.

Now, edit your writing, if you desire to do so. Re-read this version—out loud. Pause to breathe and give thanks in any manner that is meaningful to you.

Consider meeting with a spiritual guide or trusted friend to share your *Life in Remembrance*, and any ensuing insights. Continue to engage this contemplative reflection for as long as it carries significance and meaning for you. Gently appreciate the gift of your breath in the present time.

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*Listen* is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org), you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions,

and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).



# Broken Wide Open

Now I must learn  
how to live again  
in a world without  
my father, brother,  
grandmother, and friend.

What to do  
in those days after  
my heart has been broken  
wide open,  
and my vulnerability  
laid bare.

The house is empty,  
their laughter  
no longer heard.

A part of me  
is now silent too.  
Now, with open ear,  
I must sit  
very still with bent ear,  
to listen for them  
in a new way—  
in the song of a bird  
or a once familiar word;

to feel them  
in the rush of the wind,  
now and again;  
to see them  
the rising sun,  
and know their presence  
when prayers are said  
at the breaking of bread.

– Wendi Romero [Louisiana, USA]

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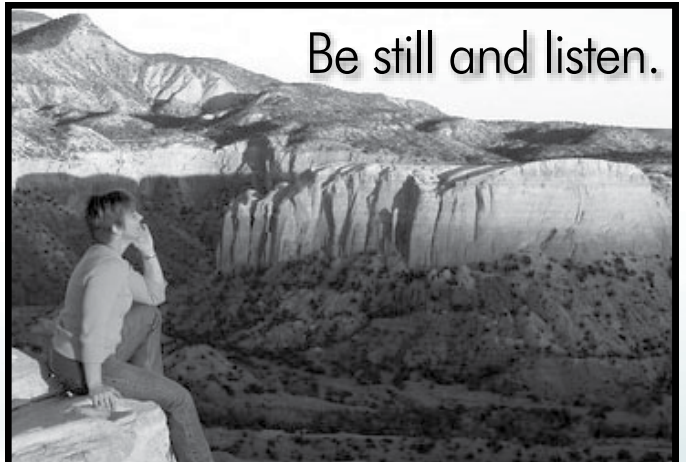
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# ASK OWL



**Q**uestion: I am afraid of what my future entails. I am in the hospital, and the outcome of my health and mobility is uncertain. I feel like I am a burden to my family and everyone I love. In the quiet moments, I alternately fill my time with television or with lamenting what may not be. I've always been a good man and provider. Why would a loving God do this to me? Could a spiritual director be helpful to someone like me?

**H**oot Hoot: Thank you for your e-mail. First off, yes—a spiritual guide would be helpful to you by offering compassionate listening and a gentle presence. Begin by asking a nurse, doctor, the receptionist, or a hospital volunteer if there is a spiritual care department or chaplain in your hospital. You do not need to be *religious* to request a visit from a chaplain or spiritual director. Do not worry that this will be an opportunity for someone to proselytize or convert you to a specific faith belief—though you might discover you have questions you want to explore. Someone who is trained in compassionate listening recognizes that you are the

one leading the conversation, the dance. You set the tone, even though the person you talk with can help guide the conversation so you don't feel uncomfortable.

Another idea for you is to watch one or more of the ten-minute videos that SDI created for the "SDI Learns From..." video series on YouTube and the SDI website. This could replace your television time, and you can watch from a laptop, iPad, or smart phone. There are more than sixty videos on the SDIworld YouTube channel. Spiritual teachers and guides from the SDI global learning community offer their wisdom, including how to seek and find a spiritual director. Additionally, since the videos are short, their timeframe might work well for you. The topics will help provide guidance to some of your questions. In fact, watching the videos might give you a sample of what it would be like to meet with a spiritual director!

May you know comfort, compassionate care from others, and gentleness towards your own beautiful self during this time of your life.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail [Listen@sdiworld.org](mailto:Listen@sdiworld.org).

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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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